

CHAPTER 1 Introduction

This Environmental Impact Report (EIR) assesses the potential environmental effects of the proposed Beach and Edinger Corridors Specific Plan (Specific Plan) within the City of Huntington Beach. The Specific Plan would require a General Plan Amendment (GPA), Zoning Text Amendment (ZTA), and Zoning Map Amendment (ZMA) to allow the proposed mix of uses and increased densities throughout the Specific Plan area (also referred to as the project site). As required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), this EIR (1) assesses the expected individual and cumulative impacts of the Specific Plan, as set forth in the Public Review Draft (October 2008); (2) identifies means of avoiding or minimizing potential adverse environmental impacts; and (3) evaluates a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed project, including the No Project Alternative.

The Initial Study/Notice of Preparation (IS/NOP) prepared for the proposed project identified four individual projects that would also be analyzed within this Program EIR. However, subsequent to the IS/NOP, it was determined that those projects would be analyzed separately from the Specific Plan so as to allow the public and decision-makers adequate time to review each project. Thus, while implementation of the Specific Plan would ultimately allow for the development of future project-specific components, individual projects are not analyzed within this EIR.

1.1 BACKGROUND

With some notable exceptions, the properties contained within the Specific Plan project site are generally characterized by low-scale commercial strip development with little in the way of pedestrian amenities. Although the City has been able to improve economic opportunities along Beach Boulevard, this artery lacks certain characteristics that well planned community development can bring. Some of the existing characteristics of the project site include: a lack in identity; clarity of location and consistent landscaping; a wide range of signage; and the absence of an incorporating theme of the various nondescript strip commercial centers. While individual establishments along the corridor have had various degrees of success, there is no synergy to the current process. Likewise, efforts to create a strategy for Edinger Avenue have not come to fruition. Therefore, the proposed Specific Plan focuses on how population and employment growth can be strategically accommodated to preserve the distinguishing and valued qualities of the community while providing new housing, jobs, and services that will complement existing uses and bring new economic investment and visual improvement to underutilized areas.

1.2 PURPOSE AND LEGAL AUTHORITY

The proposed project requires the discretionary approval of the Huntington Beach City Council. Therefore, it is subject to the requirements of CEQA. In accordance with Section 15121(a) of the CEQA Guidelines, the purpose of this EIR is to serve as an informational document that:

...will inform public agency decision-makers and the public generally of the significant environmental effect of a project, identify possible ways to minimize the significant effects, and describe reasonable alternatives to the project.

The City has determined that a Program EIR is the appropriate document to analyze the potential significant impacts of the Specific Plan. A Program EIR provides a programmatic analysis of the proposed project. As defined by CEQA Guidelines Section 15168(a), a Program EIR:

...is an EIR which may be prepared on a series of actions that can be characterized as one large project and are related either:

- Geographically
- As logical parts in the chain of contemplated actions
- In connection with rules, regulations, plans, or other general criteria to govern the conduct of a continuing program, or
- As individual activities carried out under the same authorizing statutory or regulatory authority and having generally similar environmental effects which can be mitigated in similar ways.

The entire proposed project site is geographically located within the City of Huntington Beach. Further, the proposed project is a Specific Plan, intended to guide and regulate growth within the City's two primary commercial corridors.

With respect to future specific development projects that could occur in the Specific Plan area, Section 15168(c) of the CEQA Guidelines requires subsequent activities to be examined in light of the Program EIR to determine whether additional environmental documentation must be prepared. If a later activity would have significant effects that were not examined in the Program EIR, subsequent environmental documentation must be prepared, consistent with Sections 15162 through 15164 of the CEQA Guidelines. Such subsequent environmental documentation would be "tiered" from the Program EIR. As established by Section 21068.5 of CEQA, tiering refers to coverage of general matters and environmental effects in an environmental impact report prepared for a policy, plan, program, or ordinance followed by narrower or site-specific environmental documents that incorporate, by reference, the discussion in any prior environmental impact report and which concentrate on the environmental effects that are (a) capable of being mitigated or (b) were not analyzed as significant effects on the environment in the prior environmental impact report. However, if any subsequent development proposal would not result in new environmental effects or the need for new mitigation measures, the subsequent activity could rely on the environmental analysis provided in this Program EIR, and no additional environmental documentation would be required.

This report serves as an informational document for the public and the City of Huntington Beach decision-makers. The process will culminate with a City hearing to consider certification of a Final EIR (FEIR) and a decision on whether or not to approve the proposed project.

1.3 EIR REVIEW PROCESS

This EIR has been prepared to meet all of the substantive and procedural requirements of CEQA (*California Public Resources Code* Section 21000 et seq.), as amended; California CEQA Guidelines (*California Code Regulations*, Title 14, Section 15000 et seq.); and the rules, regulations and procedures for the implementation of CEQA as executed by the City of Huntington Beach. Accordingly, the City of Huntington Beach has been identified as the Lead Agency for this project, taking primary responsibility for conducting the environmental review process and approving or denying the project.

As a first step in complying with the procedural requirements of CEQA, the City filed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) with the California Office of Planning and Research as an indication that an EIR would be prepared. In turn, the NOP was distributed on July 31, 2008, to involved public agencies and interested parties for a 30-day public review period. A scoping meeting was held on August 21, 2008. The purpose of the public review period, including the scoping meeting, was to solicit comments on the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be included in the EIR. The Initial Study/Notice of Preparation (IS/NOP), as well as the public comments received during the public review process are included in Appendix A (Initial Study/Notice of Preparation and Comments on the IS/NOP) of this EIR.

During preparation of the EIR, agencies, organizations, and persons who the City believed might have an interest in the proposed project were specifically contacted. Information, data, and observations from these contacts are included in the EIR. Agencies or interested persons who did not respond during the public review period of the NOP will have an opportunity to comment during the public review period for the EIR, as well as at subsequent hearings on the proposed project.

This EIR or a notice of availability of this EIR for public review has been distributed to agencies that have commented on the NOP, surrounding cities, counties, and interested parties for a 45-day public review period in accordance with Section 15087 of the CEQA Guidelines. During the 45-day public review period, the EIR is available for review at the following locations:

City of Huntington Beach
Planning Department
2000 Main Street
Huntington Beach, CA 92648

City of Huntington Beach
City Clerk's Office
2000 Main Street
Huntington Beach, CA 92648

Central Library and Cultural Center
7111 Talbert Avenue
Huntington Beach, CA 92648

View and download the documents online at:

www.surfcity-hb.org

Navigate to:

<http://www.surfcity-hb.org/Government/Departments/Planning/major/>

All documents incorporated by reference in this EIR are available for review at the City.

Written comments on the DEIR should be addressed to:

Rosemary Medel, Associate Planner
City of Huntington Beach
Department of Planning
2000 Main Street
Huntington Beach, CA 92648

Upon completion of the 45-day public review period, written responses to all significant comments raised with respect to environmental issues discussed in the EIR will be prepared and incorporated into the FEIR. Furthermore, written responses to comments received from any state agencies will be made available to these agencies at least ten days prior to the public hearing during which the certification of the FEIR will be considered. These comments, and their responses, will be included in the FEIR for consideration by the City Council, as well as any other public decision-makers.

According to *Public Resources Code* Section (PRC) 21081, the Lead Agency must make specific Findings of Fact (“Findings”) before approving the FEIR, when the EIR identifies significant environmental impacts that may result from a project. The purpose of the Findings is to establish the link between the contents of the FEIR and the action of the Lead Agency with regard to approval or rejection of the proposed project. Prior to approval of a project, one of three findings must be made, as follows:

- Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effect as identified in the FEIR.
- Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the FEIR.

Additionally, according to PRC Section 21081.6, for projects in which significant impacts will be avoided by mitigation measures, the Lead Agency must include a mitigation monitoring program (MMP). The purpose of the MMP is to ensure compliance with required mitigation during implementation of the project.

However, environmental impacts may not always be mitigated to a less-than-significant level. When this occurs, impacts are considered significant and unavoidable. If a public agency approves a project that has significant and unavoidable impacts, the agency shall state in writing the specific reasons for approving the project, based on the FEIR and any other information in the public record. This is termed “Statement of Overriding Considerations” and is used to explain the specific reasons why the benefits of

a proposed project make its unavoidable environmental effects acceptable. The statement is prepared, if required, after the FEIR has been completed, yet before action to approve the project has been taken.

1.4 EIR ADEQUACY

The level of detail contained throughout this EIR is consistent with the CEQA Guidelines (Section 15151) and recent court decisions, which provide the standard of adequacy on which this document is based. The Guidelines state as follows:

An EIR should be prepared with a sufficient degree of analysis to provide decision-makers with information, which enables them to make a decision, which intelligently takes account of environmental consequences. An evaluation of the environmental effects of a proposed project need not be exhaustive, but the sufficiency of an EIR is to be reviewed in the light of what is reasonably feasible. Disagreement among experts does not make an EIR inadequate, but the EIR should summarize the main points of disagreement among the experts. The courts have looked not for perfection, but for adequacy, completeness, and a good faith effort at full disclosure.

1.5 INTENDED USES OF THE EIR

As previously mentioned, this EIR is intended to provide decision-makers and the public with information that enables them to consider the environmental consequences of the proposed project. EIRs not only identify significant or potentially significant environmental effects, but also identify ways in which those impacts can be reduced to less-than-significant levels, whether through the imposition of mitigation measures or through the implementation of specific alternatives to the project. In a practical sense, EIRs function as a technique for fact-finding, allowing an applicant, concerned citizens, and agency staff an opportunity to collectively review and evaluate baseline conditions and project impacts through a process of full disclosure.

To gain the most value from this report, certain key points should be kept in mind:

- This report should be used as a tool to give the reader an overview of the possible ramifications of the proposed project.
- A specific environmental impact is not necessarily irreversible or permanent. Most impacts, particularly in urban, more developed areas, can be wholly or partially mitigated by incorporating conditions of approval and/or changes recommended in this report during the design and construction phases of project development.
- This report, while a summary of facts, reflects the professional judgment of the authors. The EIR was prepared by consultants retained by the City and by City staff, and was subject to the independent review and judgment of the City. The City independently reviewed and analyzed the EIR for the proposed project, and the EIR reflects the independent judgment of the City.

1.6 DOCUMENT ORGANIZATION

To help the reader locate information of particular interest, a brief summary of the contents of each chapter of the EIR is provided. The contents include the following:

- **Chapter 1: Introduction**—This section provides an overview of the background of the proposed project, the environmental process, and document organization.
- **Chapter 2: Executive Summary**—This section summarizes the characteristics of the proposed project, the environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and residual impacts with the proposed project.
- **Chapter 3: Project Description**—This section includes the location and boundaries of the proposed project; project objectives; a general description of technical, economic, and environmental characteristics; and intended uses of the EIR.
- **Chapter 4: Environmental Impact Analysis**—This section describes and evaluates the environmental issue areas, including the existing environmental setting, applicable environmental thresholds, environmental impacts (short term, long term, direct, and indirect), policy considerations related to the particular environmental issue area under analysis, and feasible mitigation measures capable of minimizing environmental harm.
- **Chapter 5: Other CEQA Considerations**—This section provides a summary of the proposed project's potential to lead to population growth and the indirect implications of that growth on the City; summarizes the discussion of cumulative impacts, provides a list of proposed project impacts that are significant and unavoidable by issue area; and identifies the irreversible changes to the natural environment resulting from the proposed project.
- **Chapter 6: Alternatives to the Proposed Project**—This section describes alternatives to the proposed project that would feasibly attain most of the basic objectives of the project while avoiding or substantially lessening any of its significant effects. The analysis evaluates the environmental effects that would result from each alternative and compares the effects to those identified for the proposed project.
- **Chapter 7: List of EIR Preparers**—This section identifies all individuals responsible for the preparation of this report.

1.7 AREAS OF CONTROVERSY TO BE RESOLVED

The discussion of environmental effects, mitigation measures, and alternatives, as summarized in Table 2-1 (Summary of Environmental Effects and Code Requirements/Mitigation Measures), and evaluated in detail in this EIR, constitutes the identification of issues to be resolved and areas of controversy, as required for compliance with Section 15123(b)(3) of the CEQA Guidelines.